

*[Sample Op/Ed on the importance of transit for economic development]*

## **Making a Wise Investment in Public Transportation**

The combination of a slowing economy and growing demands on taxpayer dollars is forcing policymakers to make tough choices between worthy causes. They should take heart: One cause merits investment not just because it is worthy in itself, but because it generates revenue for taxpayers rather than draining it away.

That investment is public transportation. Public transit creates jobs, protects the environment, enhances our quality of life and makes it easier for employees to get to work and consumers to get to local businesses. For those reasons, it should be a linchpin of *[community]*'s economic development strategy -- and federal policymakers should help with new funds.

Public transportation is an investment in the truest sense of the word: An outlay today pays out considerable profit down the road. Consider this snapshot: Nationwide, government invests \$15.4 billion in public transportation a year. Public transportation generates upwards of \$60 billion in economic benefits. Public transportation boosts state and local tax revenues by at least 4 and as much as 16 percent. Some 30,000 people work directly for the public transportation industry, which creates thousands more jobs indirectly through fields ranging from engineering to construction.

Every dollar we invest in running public transportation systems boosts business sales by another three. A \$10 million investment in building public transportation systems creates more than 300 jobs, and the same amount spent on running them creates nearly 600 more. *[Insert local data as appropriate.]*

Public transportation generates those economic benefits for several reasons. It helps the right people to get to the right jobs, without wasting otherwise productive hours in the process. It allows employers to tap into the labor pool created by the nation's welfare-to-work initiative: fully 94 percent of welfare recipients have no other way to get to work. And public transportation helps get customers in the door as well.

Of course, economic development ultimately comes down to consumers having money in their pocket to spend. Public transportation helps ensure they have more of it. A typical family living in an area with several public transportation options saves \$250 a month on car-related expenses.

And, perhaps most important, public transportation contributes to a critical determinant of economic success: quality of life. Communities that are great places to live attract the best businesses and the most skilled people.

Public transportation improves quality of life in several ways. It cuts down on the time drivers lose to stopped traffic, which can reach as much as 40 hours a year. *[Insert local*

*stats as appropriate.*] Meanwhile, while all those cars are idling in traffic, they're also pumping pollutants into the atmosphere. Public transportation, on the other hand, prevents the emission of more than 126 million pounds of hydrocarbons, which cause smog, and 156 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, which can cause respiratory illness. *[Insert local statistics, anecdotes if available.]* It conserves energy, reducing gasoline consumption by 1.5 billion gallons a year.

That makes for a more livable community. So do green, open spaces -- which public transportation helps to protect from being paved over for more roads.

All those benefits help explain why use of public transportation is on the rise. In 1999, Americans rode 21.2 billion miles on buses -- enough to circle the earth nearly 850,000 times -- 8.8 billion miles on commuter rail and 445 million miles in vanpools.

But this increased use also makes for increased costs. Here in *[community]*, we need to invest more in public transportation, both to meet those costs and to expand transit to serve more people and accommodate future growth.

*[Describe local need.]*

To be sure, public transportation systems aren't cheap to build or run, and policymakers have more demands than they have dollars. But public transportation pays for itself several times over. And if a stronger economy is the destination we seek, public transit is the fastest way to get there.